

POLYANTHAS AND FLORIBUNDA ROSES

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This informational article is another in the series about a class of roses. Since the history of the Floribundas occurred ostensibly as a result of the creation of the Polyanthas, the two classes will be considered together here.

In all probability, the beginning of the Polyanthas started with the English plant collector Robert Fortune, who, while in China in 1865, sent back to England an unusual rose plant. Its flowers were pink, semi-double and produced in clusters. The plant was a low-growing, non-recurrent form of *R. multiflora*. In 1870, the Mayor of Lyon, France, also received a plant of the same variety, which he had placed in the public garden in Lyon. Jean Sisley of Lyon obtained a plant and with it produced a number of seedlings, one of which he gave to B. J. Guillot, a nurseryman in Lyon who had produced **La France**, the first hybrid tea in 1867. Guillot propagated the seedling and put it into commerce in 1875 as **Ma Pâquerette (Pâquerette)**. This rose is considered to have been the first Polyantha although the classification was not created until the following year by the French botanist and gardener Alfred Carrière. The name “Polyantha” was derived from the Greek word meaning “many flowered.”



The Polyantha China Doll, 1946
(<https://www.veseys.com>)

Most of the Polyantha varieties are low-growing, very bushy and produce an abundance of flowers. It has been observed that at times the flowering is so profuse the foliage isn't visible. The flowers are generally small, about an inch to an inch and a half across, and appear, depending on the variety, as single, semi-double or double and in a variety of colors, including orange, red, pink, blends and white. They are excellent for rose bedding and are also recommended as cut flowers. Some have a slight fragrance, but a strong perfume is not among their virtues. It has been observed that because of their low growth habit, most people are not willing to bend over to sample their aroma anyway. The earliest Polyanthas included **Pâquerette** (1875), **Cecile Brunner** (1880), **Mignonette** (1881), **Perle d'Or** (1883) and **Gloire des Polyantha** (1887).

Some of the more highly rated Polyanthas listed in the 2001 ARS Handbook for Selecting Roses are:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Color</u>	<u>Rating</u>
Orange Morsday	orange blend	9.4
Mrs. R.M. Finch	medium pink	8.9
La Marne	pink blend	8.8
Marie Pavie	white	8.8
Lullaby	white	8.7
The Fairy	light pink	8.7
Verdun	medium red	8.7
White Pet	white	8.6

Although the Polyanthas are not noted for their fragrance some have fair to good fragrance and some few possess strong or intense fragrance. According to Pickering Nurseries (Ontario, Canada), the following are considered to have “strong fragrance): **Clotilde Soupert**, **Marie Pavié**, **Mevrouw Nathalie Nypels** and **Perle d’Or**.

With the advent of the Polyantha, breeders began to cross known varieties with varieties from numerous other classifications, including the Hybrid Perpetuals, Ramblers like **Crimson Rambler** and **Dorothy Perkins**, and with the recently developed Hybrid Teas. Many new varieties were created. It seems that everyone in the rose business was searching for a rose with the characteristics of the Polyantha but with increased size in the blooms.

As new varieties appeared, nurserymen began to use the classification name Hybrid Polyantha to distinguish them from the earlier Polyanthas. It was soon recognized that “Hybrid Polyantha” as a class name was inappropriate because Polyanthas were themselves hybrids. It was Dr. J. H. Nicholas of the U.S. who solved the problem with his recommendation of the name “Floribunda” for the new varieties which were larger in size than the Polyanthas. The honor of the first Floribunda went to Germany in 1908 with the rose **Grüss an Aacken**, a salmon pink, cluster-flowered, repeat blooming variety from the Geduldig nursery. A Polyantha, curiously, was not a parent to the first Floribunda, for **Grüss an Aacken** was derived from a cross between **Frau Karl Druschki**, a Hybrid Perpetual and **Franz Deegen**, a Hybrid Tea.

With a desire to produce varieties which could stand the cold Scandinavian winter and which would produce many blooms in the short summers there, Svend Poulsen of Denmark produced a number of Hybrid Perpetuals which were a huge success in the rose world market and stimulated significant effort in other nurseries in pursuit of the Floribunda, an effort that has not abated to this day. Poulsens’s efforts produced **Rödhätte**, **Else Poulsen** and **Kirsten Poulsen**, all of which are today classified as Floribundas.

Some of the early Floribundas of note in addition to those already mentioned include: **Ellen Poulson**, **Coral Cluster**, and **Joseph Guy** (Lafayette*). [*: Modern Roses XI]

The floribunda today is noted for its ability to bear flowers in large clusters with a number of flowers in bloom at any one time. The class is unrivaled for providing massive, colorful, long-lasting garden displays. The hybrid tea has a bloom cycle of every six to seven weeks; the floribunda blooms continuously.

Some of the more highly rated Floribundas listed in the 2001 ARS Handbook for Selecting Roses are:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Color</u>	<u>Rating</u>
Nicole	white blend	9.1
Bridal White	white	9.0
Europeana	dark red	8.9
Iceberg	white	8.9
Sexy Remy	medium pink	8.9
Hannah Gordon	pink blend	8.9
Lavaglut	dark red	8.8
Travemunde	medium red	8.8
Dicky	orange pink	8.7

<u>Name</u>	<u>Color</u>	<u>Rating</u>
Escapade	mauve	8.7
Sunsprite	deep yellow	8.7
Priscilla Burton	red blend	8.6
Royal Occasion	orange red	8.6
Poulsen's Pearl	light pink	8.5
Showbiz	medium red	8.5
Gene Boerner	medium pink	8.4
Margaret Merrill	white	8.4
Pink Revelation	light pink	8.4
Playtime	orange red	8.4

The All American Rose Selections (AARS) organization often selects a floribunda as one of its "Selections For The Year." **Betty Boop**, a yellow blend was selected for 1999, and **Marmalade Skies**, orange blend in color, was a selection for 2001. The first Florabunda selected by AARS was **World's Fair**, a dark red variety from Kordes in Germany, in 1940.